



Father Catania Speaks at Day of Recollection

By Mike Dragonetti

Last summer, at our annual family reunion, my cousin, a sexton for a Catholic parish in Queens, mentioned, “we have a priest who’s been doing great sermons for us named Father Catania.” For parishioners of St. Martha’s from 1976 through the ’80s, Fr. Catania gave some memorable sermons, and anyone who attended Mass at that time can remember some snippets of them! When Msgr. Caldwell announced Fr. Catania would be giving a retreat for St. Martha’s volunteers I signed up immediately, and as always, Fr. Catania delivered. Here are some excerpts from his October 29th lecture:

He likened the evolution of a parish to reinventing the wheel, “. . . time changed and the wheel broke. It had to be reinvented. Wheels can be an open door to us . . .

“A parish is like a personality, each acquires one over the years. The notion of a parish is a personality of sorts. It moves on over time, and it needs to be reinvented. A parish is a structure led by clergy and filled in by laity. There has to be a sense of what the parish is about. We have the opportunity to begin building a new sense to be, to belong to, and to own a parish. Church and parish assume new meanings as the ingathering goes on. The rhythm of the parish has been driven by prayer and determined by all those who pray.

“Breaking down fear is the most important thing adults can accomplish. Rising above fear can be a liberating discovery.

“Shape St. Martha’s to meet the needs of now. Give who you are. Collaborative ministry: the time is now.

Compare a parish to a co-op, in which everybody has a piece and a say. Each ought to speak his/her mind. If not, something vital can be lost. We need to take ownership of what God has given us and not be afraid to do so. Let the rest of the community grow with what you have to give.”

Father Catania also took questions from those in attendance:

On working together in the parish, build a “strong community with faith at the center. Break down apathy and suspicion. Demonstrate that we can work together despite our differences. We’re all Catholic. Set the example.”

On change, “Every change is a crossroad. How we react is up to us.”

On pooling our gifts, “there is no gift that isn’t pertinent to building a community. Be creative in using what comes down the pike. Trust your own gift, the parish can find a use for it.”

On priests, prophets and kings, “We are givers of self. When you give of yourself, you bring fulfillment to both you and the recipient. We lead by serving and providing.”

On avoiding conflicts, “Try to put out the fires before they turn out worse. Heal the divisions, soothe the hurts.”

Fr. Catania concluded with, “do what you can to quench the little brushfires. Most people want to do the right thing. We have so much more in common than we have differences. You don’t have a savior until you need him. He’s not absent if you planted him.”